

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Allen Boyd (D-North Florida) today took steps to block the implementation of a plan by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that would impose new regulations on Gulf Coast oyster production. In a letter to Dr. Margaret Hamburg, Commissioner of the FDA, Congressman Boyd urged the FDA to retract any mandatory actions that would prohibit oyster harvesting in the Gulf during the months of May through November.

The proposed reformulated FDA policy would put in place additional controls to prevent *Vibrio vulnificus* (V.v.) infections by mandating that all oysters harvested in Gulf Coast waters be subjected to a procedure known as Post Harvest Processing. Currently, only 15 percent of oysters retrieved from Gulf waters undergo this procedure.

“North Florida’s oyster industry is an economic engine for our coastal communities, and this new regulation would place an undue burden on an industry that has worked very hard over the years and been successful at reducing possible infections,” said Congressman Boyd. “The FDA has provided no justification as to why they would impose this new regulation on shellfish farmers, and little consideration seems to be given to the impact that this would have on the industry and the citizens trying to earn a living.”

The oyster industry has worked with the FDA for years to take voluntary steps to reduce the disease and death from V.v., extremely rare bacteria that affect fewer people than were struck by lightning last year. Since 2001, the incident rate of V.v. has declined 35 percent largely due to voluntary efforts implemented by the oyster industry. According to the FDA’s own analysis, V.v. now affects less than 30 individuals on average and results in fewer than 15 deaths per year, primarily in populations already susceptible to these rare bacteria.

Congressman Boyd concluded, “The livelihood of oyster farmers depend on their ability to quickly fish, farm, process, and distribute their product in a safe, efficient, and reliable manner – the same way they’ve been doing for over a hundred years. I will be working with the FDA to rectify this issue for the benefit of our oyster industry and coastal communities.”

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